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Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is being submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233, by which the Council requested me to keep it informed, through the submission of reports, on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS). Additionally, in paragraph 11 of its resolution 1580 (2004), the Council requested that I submit a written report to it every three months on the aforementioned subject.

2. The present report focuses particularly on recent developments within the prevailing political and economic situation in the country since my last report, dated 29 September 2006 (S/2006/783).

II. Political developments

3. During the period under review, the political climate has been marked by the ongoing national reconciliation process; the difficult reintegration of the dissidents of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC); the return of former President Koumba Yalá, on 28 October 2006, to contest the elections for the leadership of the Party for Social Renewal (PRS); and growing challenges to the current Government headed by Prime Minister Aristides Gomes.

4. Mr. Yalá, who had been away from the country for a year, announced that he had returned to lead the PRS to victory in the 2008 legislative elections. He subsequently won the contest for leadership at the PRS national congress, which was held from 8 to 12 November, securing almost 67 per cent of votes cast. Though Mr. Yalá had initially supported the establishment of the present Government, he recently declared as illegitimate the Forum para a Convergência do Desenvolvimento and the coalition of parties, including the PRS, that supports the current Government in the National Popular Assembly, as well as the Government itself. His actions have heightened political tensions and raised concerns that the Government may be forced to dissolve.

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5. While Mr. Yalá has called for holding legislative elections before 2008 as scheduled, the leader of the biggest party in parliament, PAIGC, along with former Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior and the party's candidate in the 2005 presidential poll, Malam Bacai Sanha, have said that early elections are not necessary. They have instead called for the current Government to be replaced by a government of national unity. The main opposition parties accuse the Government of incompetence and corruption. For his part, Prime Minister Aristides Gomes has warned that, as political stability constitutes a precondition for the disbursement of pledges made at the donor round table in Geneva on 7 and 8 November, if the current political climate continues, the future of pledged donations is at stake. In view of the chorus of criticisms, President Vieira has initiated consultations with the various political actors in order to help stabilize the political situation in the country.

6. Mr. Yalá has stated that the African Union (AU) had asked him to support President Vieira in the second round of the 2005 presidential elections. That statement led the losing PAIGC candidate, Malam Bacai Sanha, to ask the AU to clarify its position. Some of Mr. Sanha's supporters accused the AU of interference in the internal affairs of the country and questioned the legitimacy of President Vieira's victory in 2005.

7. Meanwhile, efforts have continued to reunify and stabilize PAIGC, which suffered major internal divisions after several of its key members pledged support for Mr. Vieira over their own party's candidate in the 2005 presidential election. In October, seven leading dissidents were reintegrated into the party's decision-making organ, the Political Bureau. The process of intra-party reconciliation, however, is far from settled as several other dissidents have continued to accuse the party leadership of blocking progress.

8. The Estados Gerais dialogue initiative continues to make headway despite resource constraints. On 29 September, the participants in the dialogue held their first consultation with some 60 representatives of the security forces, including the Chief of General Staff, General Tagme Na Waie. General Tagme reiterated his support for the initiative and announced that the National Commission on the Reconciliation of the Armed Forces, set up in 2005 to promote reconciliation and reintegration among the military, would be part of a broader national reconciliation process under the dialogue initiative. The Gorée Institute in Dakar and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have provided financial support, while UNOGBIS is focused on facilitating and encouraging the national reconciliation and dialogue process.

9. The Office, in partnership with the Netherlands Development Organization, held two workshops on leadership skills: the first in October for departmental heads of the National Popular Assembly, and the second in November for leaders of parliamentary special commissions. Training in dispute resolution and collaborative decision-making skills [illegible] part of a broader capacity-building project for parliament submitted to the United Nations Democracy Fund. The project, which is to be coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and implemented by UNOGBIS, the Netherlands Development Organization and the National Democratic Institute, will also include technical assistance to improve parliamentary oversight capacity and research issues affecting women and children, such as gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, the project will provide support for women parliamentarians working on cross-border peace issues and

women's national dialogue initiatives. The Fund is also considering a project presented by the International Peacebuilding Alliance (Interpeace), in partnership with the National Institute for Studies and Research (INEP) of Guinea-Bissau, to support inclusive national dialogue and provide policy support to address the deep-seated political and governance challenges confronting the country.

III. Economic and social aspects

10. The economic situation in the country remains precarious and has compromised the Government's ability to pay civil servants' salaries and to deliver basic services. The Government currently faces several months of salary arrears. Social tensions remain high, as illustrated by recent labour strikes in the education and health sectors.

11. The gravity of the economic situation was brought to the attention of the international and regional partners of Guinea-Bissau by the Prime Minister at the donor round-table, which took place from 7-8 November in Geneva under the theme "Security and Development". The donors commended the authorities of Guinea-Bissau for the progress made thus far in undertaking economic reforms and for finalizing the country's poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) and the security sector reform plan. While the result represented an encouraging start, the pledges of $262.51 million fell short of the overall goal of $538 million. Therefore, the country needs urgent short-term support to close the budget gap for 2006/2007 and to implement the PRSP and the security sector reform plan. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) considers the closing of the budget gap a vital component in creating an environment conducive to putting in place a programme for emergency post-conflict assistance, which international partners have noted would bring in needed additional support for the country. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) plans to dispatch a mission to Bissau in the second half of January 2007 to assess the situation.

12. Despite efforts to improve revenue performance and contain expenditure, government revenue has fallen below target. The shortfall is largely a result the lower than expected fees from fishing licences and taxes on cashew exports. The revenue from fishing licences has been affected by delays in negotiating a new fishing agreement with the European Union. However, amidst the shortfall, the increase in non-tax revenue from penalties for illegal fishing is encouraging. The increase in the producer price of cashew nuts from 250 CFA francs to 350 CFA francs, combined with a fall in world prices, significantly reduced cashew exports. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), it is likely that only 60 per cent of the crop has been exported. Following the IMF mission, from 12-25 October, the Government agreed not to intervene in cashew marketing arrangements but to focus instead on providing incentives to traders to clear remaining cashew stocks still held in rural areas by reducing the reference price used for calculating cashew export taxes.

13. Rural livelihoods were adversely affected by the poor management of the cashew season and loss of arable land owing to flooding. However, the food security situation in the southern regions of Quinara and Tombali is improving. The World Food Programme (WFP), FAO and the Government have supported food-for-work schemes to rehabilitate rice fields. The World Food Programme distributed 800 tons

of food relief to over 67,000 people. The food security situation will continue to be closely monitored in 2007, as production levels might not be sufficient to compensate for the loss of rice cultivation in 2005 and reduced income from cashew sales.

14. The start of the school year in State schools, which was set for 3 October, was delayed until 20 November owing to continuing disagreements between the Ministry of National Education and Higher Education and teachers over contracts, salary arrears and subsidies. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) developed a special programme to reintegrate children and teachers in schools affected by the military conflict in the north of Guinea-Bissau earlier in 2006. On 15 November, UNICEF, the World Health Organization and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) launched a joint effort with the Ministry of Health to organize a country-wide distribution of treated mosquito nets targeting 187,000 children under the age of five. The campaign will also provide children with vitamin A supplements and treatment for intestinal worms. Guinea-Bissau will receive $3.4 million over three years from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. In October, UNICEF, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the Ministry of Health launched a paediatric anti-retroviral programme for 1,500 children affected by HIV/AIDS. The five-year national strategic plan for HIV/AIDS control is being prepared for approval in early December.

IV. Military and security aspects

15. A technical group from the Security Sector Development Advisory Team of the United Kingdom visited Guinea-Bissau from 24 September to 5 October to help the Government finalize its strategy paper on security sector reform. That document and a triennial investment plan for $184 million were approved by the Council of Ministers on 30 October. Government efforts also benefited from advice from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. According to the Ministry of Defence, the security sector reform plan envisages the reduction of the armed forces from 9,650 to 3,440. It also envisages streamlining law enforcement bodies and the creation of a national gendarmerie. UNOGBIS will assist the authorities in carrying out a systematic national information campaign on the modalities of the Security Sector Reform plan.

16. The first meeting of the newly formed national commission to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons was held on 26 October and brought together representatives from various government institutions and civil society. UNOGBIS will be assisting the national commission by providing advisory services on a workplan and on legislation.

17. The civilian police and human rights units of UNOGBIS trained 33 police officers in the southern regions of Quinara and Tombali in October on the code of conduct for law enforcement officers and the use of force and firearms. The police cannot confirm the increasing media reports of crime owing to the lack of records. On 24 September, 674 kg of cocaine and stockpiles of weapons and communications equipment were seized, elevating concerns that the involvement of organized crime in the country is increasing.

18. The National Mine Action Coordination Centre, supported by UNDP, continued emergency mine clearance operations in the former conflict area of São Domingos in the north of the country. The international NGO, Handicap International, was deployed with financial support from UNDP the Mine Action Service and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. During September, 10 anti-personnel and 152 items of unexploded ordnance were destroyed. Approximately 7,000 square metres of secondary roads between affected villages were cleared and verified as mine-free. The national NGO, Lutamos Todos contra as Minas (LUTCAM), in partnership with the international NGO, Cleared Ground Demining, continued with the removal of explosive remnants of war from the city of Bissau. About 4,848 munitions were cleared.

V. Human rights aspects

19. During the reporting period, UNOGBIS maintained contacts with the authorities regarding the 12 people detained without charge since March 2006 in connection with the fighting on the northern border, and requested access to them. The Office is also continuing to work with the Ministry of Justice to legalize the national institution for human rights, which will play a crucial role in promoting and protecting human rights principles.

20. The Office has continued its advocacy role, through the parliamentary commission, on constitutional affairs, human rights and administration for the ratification of core human rights treaties. In September, the Office of the Public Prosecutor, with technical assistance from UNICEF, set up an office to assist women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

21. During the reporting period, UNOGBIS produced radio programmes on dialogue and reconciliation, human rights, security sector reform and the control and elimination of small arms and light weapons. Two courses were held for print and radio journalists. Training sessions in November focused on reinforcing journalistic skills and the role of the media in development and peace. The second course was designed specifically for women journalists, and focused on journalistic skills and on gender, media, development and dialogue issues.

VI. Observations and recommendations

22. I wish to commend the Government of Guinea-Bissau for the successful organization of the donor round-table in Geneva in November. The conference, by highlighting the theme "Security and Development", confirmed the Government's recognition of the linkage between security, stability and development. The holding of the long-awaited round table, following several postponements, is a critical step forward as the Government of Guinea-Bissau strives to restore normalcy in the country. I commend and express deep appreciation to the Member States and the various organizations that participated and pledged support for Guinea-Bissau during the conference.

23. I strongly urge the political actors in Guinea-Bissau to put national interests above other considerations and to pursue negotiated solutions to their differences so as not to jeopardize political stability in the country or compromise the common

objective to promote development. The country can ill afford disruptions at a time when its partners are considering government efforts for urgent budgetary support and the International Monetary Fund is planning a mission in January 2007 to discuss emergency assistance. I wish to reiterate the position that, without political stability, development cannot advance and cooperation with international partners, including investors, cannot be guaranteed.

24. I commend the decision of the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund to support access by Guinea-Bissau to emergency post-conflict assistance. However, the country needs further support to make that assistance a reality, and I renew my appeal to members of the international community to support the country generously, especially to help close its budgetary gap for 2006/2007. Equally, I call on the Government to pursue vigorously good governance and the fight against corruption.

25. UNOGBIS and the Security Sector Development Advisory Team of the United Kingdom played a critical advisory role in supporting the Government in drafting its national security sector reform strategy. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Government of the United Kingdom for its invaluable contribution to the Guinea-Bissau security sector review process. I encourage the authorities of Guinea-Bissau to continue to keep public administration and security sector reform high on the country's agenda, and renew my call to all stakeholders, both internal and external, to do their utmost to ensure the successful implementation of these important reforms.

26. I am also pleased to note the increasing coordination between the United Nations system and the international and regional partners in Guinea-Bissau through the International Partners Group.

27. As indicated in my previous report of 29 September 2006 (S/2006/783), I have recommended that the mandate of UNOGBIS be extended until 31 December 2007, to enable the Office to continue providing assistance to Guinea-Bissau to consolidate peace and stability. The country's goal to achieve sustainable progress depends, above all, on the creation of a climate of confidence, both within and outside its territory, and on its commitment to democratic governance. I should like to conclude by commending the staff of the Office, under the leadership of my representative, Shola Omoregie, as well as the entire United Nations country team for the important work they continue to carry out in Guinea-Bissau to contribute to the realization of peace and progress in that country.